

NEWS

APPALACHIAN CENTER
BEREA COLLEGE



LETTER

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Winter 1999

Looking Forward

March 28-April 3: They've always got a new wrinkle or two down at the John C. Campbell Folk School. During this week you can learn how to make "handbuilt landscapes" by turning photographs and postcards into "quiltlets," under the tutelage of Sandi Case, the school's resident quilter. If you want to try something else instead, you'll find everything from basketry to marbling to woodcarving. Successive weeks will continue to offer such across-the-board crafts instruction. For precise details, phone 800/FOLKSCH or write the school at One Folk School Road, Brasstown, N.C. 28902.

April 10: First annual Blue Ridge Symposium, Explore Park, Roanoke, Va.; this park is dedicated to educating visitors about the culture of the Blue Ridge. Theme: "At Century's Turn: Celebrating Students and Scholarship." Contact Shannon Brooks, 540/427-1800.

April 15-17: The much-to-be-welcomed New River Symposium returns for its biennial visit. In keeping with President Clinton's designation of the entire 250-mile length of the river as an American Heritage River (one of 14), participants will present papers reflecting the cultural and natural heritage of the river; presenters will include a variety of persons with professional or avocational interest in the river. This year they'll talk about cougars, water quality, witness trees, Primitive Baptists, distribution of fish species in the New River Basin, and other assorted topics. The meeting will be held at the Holiday Inn Express in Boone, N.C., near the headwaters of the New River.

For any further information about the symposium, contact the Chief of Interpretation, National Park Service, New River Gorge National River, P.O. Box 246, Glen Jean, W. Va. 25846, or phone 304/465-6509. The symposium is sponsored jointly by the New River Gorge National River and the West Virginia Division of Culture and History.

April 17-18: Bear on the Square Mountain Festival, Dahlonega, Ga., guaranteed to provide authentic old-time and bluegrass music, along with traditional crafts. Featured performers will be Ginny Hawker and Tracy Schwarz, the Georgia Potlickers, the Morgans and others. Music information: 706/864-7817; crafts information: 706/864-6244; accommodations: 706/864-3711.

April 18-24: Spring dulcimer week, Augusta Heritage Center. Instructors will include Ken Lewis, Ken Kolodner, Sam Moffat, Patty Looman, Molly Freibert, Karen Mueller, David Schnauffer and Keith Young, teaching hammered and mountain dulcimer at carefully calibrated beginning

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Mountains Going Topless?

"Will 1999 be the year that the mountains go topless?" Alice Cornett, a writer in London, Ky., recently posed this question in response to reports of a coal company's plan to strip-mine on Black Mountain, Kentucky's highest peak at 4,139 feet.

Cornett could just as well have been talking about West Virginia, where mountaintop removal, as it's known, is an equally hot issue. In essence, the method involves blasting or scraping off the tops of mountains to expose coal seams; the excess rock is dumped into the nearest valley, thus creating a flatter landscape. Last winter's U.S. Office of Surface Mining report on the practice condemned many such mines as illegal and commented that they had received permits from West Virginia environmental officials without meeting federal requirements calling for justification for "flattening" the land.

According to the Kentucky State Nature Preserves, "Big Black," as it's called, is an island of such biodiversity that it supports at least 50 rare, threatened or endangered species, many not found anywhere else in the state. It's also the site of the Cumberland River's headwaters.

"Seriously," says Cornett, "who would consider destroying a Kentucky landmark," which is, after all, "the highest point in the state. You guessed it—a coal company!"

But, like it or not, says Gary White, chairman of the West Virginia Coal Association and president of a mining company, mountaintop removal is the wave of coal mining's future. According to White, the world market "can no longer support underground mining." In Kentucky, however, the group called Kentuckians for the Commonwealth has approached the problem by creating a petition seeking the designation of the area above 3,000 feet as unsuitable for surface mining. The director of the Kentucky Resources Council, Tom FitzGerald, who drafted the petition, says that the document points to the "maintenance of the visual quality, the biological integrity of the 'Big' Black Mountain, and the quality of the water draining from the mountain" as deserving primacy over the use of the land for surface mining.

On April 6 a public hearing on declaring Black Mountain unsuitable for mining will be held at the Black Mountain Elementary School in Evarts, Harlan County, Ky. In both Kentucky and West Virginia, of course, the long-fought battle between conservationists and coal companies seems likely to continue until the last trump sounds the end of all earthly litigation. ■

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and advanced levels. For full information, write the center at Davis & Elkins College, 100 Campus Drive, Elkins, W.Va. 26241, or phone 304/637-1209.

April 21-22: Berea College Appalachian Fund Affiliates Conference; Alumni Building, Berea College. Representatives of all the organizations helped by the fund will give progress reports; members of the public are especially invited to attend. If you would like more information, call Brenda Davenport Harris at the fund office: 606/986-9341, ext. 5023.

April 29-May 1: Ninth annual Boxcar Pinion Memorial Bluegrass Festival, Chattanooga, Tenn., with J. D. Crowe, the Lonesome River Band and other performers; details from 706/820-2228.

April 29-May 2: 12th annual Merle Fest, Wilkesboro, N.C. A very big affair featuring Doc Watson, Earl Scruggs, Ricky Skaggs and a legion of other performers. For details, phone 800/343-7857.

May 2-4: Virginia Governor's Conference on Greenways and Trails; Roanoke Airport Marriott. This gathering, which will include field trips and other excursions, will feature workshops on trail planning and design; construction and maintenance; funding; public relations, advocacy and marketing; and management. A strategy session will consider the future of trails in Virginia. For more information, call 804/798-0045.

May 7-8: Annual meeting, Middle Atlantic Folklife Association; Pencater Complex at the University of Delaware, Newark. This year's theme is "Geography, Landscape and Folk Culture," focusing on the traditional life of those who live by the water. For details, phone Michael Miller at 302/739-4413.

May 7-9: 30th annual Appalachian Festival, Coney Island, Cincinnati, sponsored by the Appalachian Community Development Association. ACDA's mailing address is P.O. Box 996, Cincinnati, Ohio 45201; phone 800/450-3070 or 513/251-3378. (If you're interested in helping out, the sponsors will be doubly glad to hear from you.)

May 14-16: Celebration of Traditional Music, sponsored by the Berea College Appalachian Center. No, it's not October, and yes, it's celebration time. (See separate story.)

May 14-16: Spring fair, Kentucky Guild of Artists and Craftsmen, Indian Fort Theater, Berea, Ky. Some 115 guild members will be selling their work, and woodworking, basket making and weaving demonstrations will go on throughout the weekend. Saturday and Sunday will see something new this year—special demonstrations of bridal gowns and wedding accessories. Children can enjoy themselves with hands-on clay projects. Veteran Appalachia hands Homer Ledford, with the Cabin Creek Band, and Loyal Jones will entertain the attending throngs with, respectively, music and humorous stories. For more information, phone 606/986-3192.

June 6-12: 22nd annual Appalachian Family Folk Week, Hindman Settlement School, Forks of Troublesome Creek, Hindman, Ky. 41822. It's a full-time immersion in music, dance and other aspects of mountain culture, featuring Jean Ritchie, Ray Slone, Tom Bledsoe and many other performers. For more details, write the school at P.O. Box 844, Hindman, Ky. 41822, or call 606/785-5475.

June 6-26: Summer session, New Opportunity School for Women. Successful applicants (up to 14 per session)

to this popular program spend three weeks learning about jobs and how to get them. The school is designed for low-income women (age 30-55) who have high school diplomas or GED certificates but who have not completed college. The program includes classes in computer basics, leadership development, Appalachian literature and writing, along with field trips and—all-important—workshops on building self-confidence. Some 265 women have now graduated from the school. For full information, contact Caroline Francis at 213 Chestnut Street, Berea, Ky. 40403; phone, 606/985-7200.

June 10-13: Seedtime on the Cumberland Festival of Mountain Arts, Whitesburg, Ky.; sponsored by Appalshop, 306 Madison St., Whitesburg, Ky. 41858; phone, 606/633-0108.

June 19: Ninth annual Mountain Arts Festival, Valley of the Winds Art Gallery, Eolia, Ky., with wood carving, quilting, music, storytelling, kids' stage and food; the artwork is by Sharman, Jeff and Evan Chapman-Crane. Information from 606/633-8652.

July 10-12: 21st annual Uncle Dave Macon Days Old-Time Music and Dance Festival, Cannonsburgh Pioneer Village, Murfreesboro, Tenn. Heralded by the people who devise such ratings as one of the top 20 July events in the Southeast, this family-oriented jamboree—named for the first person to be featured on the Grand Ole Opry as an individual performer—is expected to draw more than 40,000 people and offers \$5,400 in prizes; it's the home of three national championships—old-time banjo, old-time buckdancing and old-time clogging. There's lots more, too. If you're interested, get in touch with Wendy S. Bryant, P.O. Box 5016, Murfreesboro, Tenn. 37133; phone, 615/893-2371; the 800 number is 716-7560.

July 11-August 15: Dance Augusta '99 begins five weeks of intensive instruction with Cajun/Creole week (July 11-16); swing, Irish step dance, clogging and everything else you ever heard of will follow in succeeding weeks. For details on this and all other Augusta activities, see contact information for April 18-24.

July 24: Annual Blue Ridge Draft Horse and Mule Show, Ferrum College, Ferrum, Va.; a showcase of old-time draft animals and a demonstration of the skills involved in working them. For details, call 540/365-4416.

July 25-30: 22nd annual Appalachian Writers' Workshop, Hindman Settlement School. The cast of mentors will include a veritable galaxy of writing favorites: James Still, George Ella Lyon, Chris Holbrook, Michael McFee, Jo Carson, Robert Morgan, Gurney Norman and still others. To find out more about this established institution, see the contact information for June 6-12.

EYE on Publications

Rocket Boys, by Homer H. Hickam, Jr. (Delacorte Press). On October 4, 1957, the Soviet Union launched Sputnik I, the world's first orbiting satellite. Some four months later the United States managed to respond with Explorer I, produced by an army team led by a former German rocket scientist, Wernher von Braun.

These events of course attracted great attention across the country, and nowhere did they arouse more intense

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Celebration Springs Forward

Homer Ledford (2nd
from r.) and the
Cabin Creek Band
will join other
headliners in the
Celebration.



Through the quarter of a century since it took its first bow in 1974, the Berea College Celebration of Traditional Music has remained devoted to the clear aim enunciated by then-Appalachian Center director Loyal Jones—to “feature old-time traditional music.” But, even so, there’ve been changes, as blues and other forms have from time to time appeared on Celebration programs.

Now, this year, there’s one big change indeed. Associated since its founding with autumn, the festival is moving to May, to coincide with the spring fair of the Kentucky Guild of Artists and Craftsmen. But you will still find plenty of the “old styles traditional to the mountains,” as Jones called them.

The big weekend begins at 7:30 on Friday evening with a concert by festival musicians. As always, a stellar group of performers will shine from the local stage. The participants will include Jerry Adams and the Sim Top Ram-

blers, Homer Ledford and the Cabin Creek Band, Carl and Buzzy Leming, Rob Mashburn, Eddie Pennington, Jim Trantham and Family, and the Ware Brothers.

As usual, Saturday will be devoted to instrumental workshops and performances, highlighted at 2:00 p.m. by a symposium, “Lined Hymns in African American Churches,” led by Carl Smith of Kentucky State University. That evening all the performers will gather for another full-scale music-making session. Square dancing, led by Susan Spalding, Berea’s dance coordinator, will follow.

If all that activity hasn’t left you clutching your pillow, you can join in a Sunday morning concert of religious music.

If you need further information, call the Appalachian Center at 606/986-9341, extension 5140, or write to the address on page 4 of this NEWSLETTER.

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interest than among a group of adolescent boys in Coalwood, W.Va., a McDowell County town of about 1,100 people where nothing much really mattered besides mining and high school football. And to nobody did Dr. von Braun become a greater hero and symbol of the new age and its new possibilities than to this same group of teenagers.

Most fascinated by the satellite and the scientist was the author of this book, which is subtitled “A Memoir” but has the layering and the interweaving of themes and characters that mark good fiction. “Sonny,” as he was known, was the second son of the mine superintendent and his on-edge, discontented wife, and was living his adolescent life in the shadow of a football-hero big brother.

But Dr. von Braun’s rockets changed everything—not magically, not all at once, but permanently. “Until I began to build and launch rockets,” Hickam tells us, “I didn’t

know my hometown was at war with itself over its children, and that my parents were locked in a bloodless combat over how my brother and I would live our lives.” Nor did he understand girls and hopeless love, nor know anything about trigonometry and calculus.

As the coal town goes into its decline (it would lose half its population by 1970), the “rocket boys” (with the help, it seems, of half the town) engage in the adventure that ultimately will indeed send the author to Cape Canaveral, the land beyond the rainbow that seems almost mythical to the group. The texture of coal-camp life, the feel of family tensions, the ache of adolescent angst, the pull of ambition, the glow of realizing a dream—all these strands entwine to produce a rich and rewarding book. No wonder it’s already a movie!

Faith and Meaning in the Southern Uplands, by Loyal Jones (University of Illinois Press). At the outset of this

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book, the author leaves us in no doubt about his purpose. He is writing, he tells us, out of his "unhappiness with the many articles and books that have been critical of Upland people and their religious beliefs and practices." He may not be quite as fired up as the angry newsman Howard Beale in the 1970s classic movie *Network* ("I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to take it any more!"), but you don't exactly have to read between the lines to feel a strong resentment built up over the years in reaction to the incursions of "missionaries seeking converts, journalists looking for strange and peculiar ways, or scholars who viewed Appalachian religion as a response or adaptation to deprived lives."

Indeed, Jones declares, these scholars have tended to dismiss mountain religion as nothing more than "a substitute for recreation, a rationalization of poverty, or an outgrowth of ignorance." And he cites Henry Shapiro's *Appalachia on Our Mind* (1978) to make the point that the arguments and appeals of mission workers concerning the great needs in Appalachia helped create the generally held negative image of the region.

The central fact for the author—demonstrated in discussion and in copious excerpts from a variety of interviews—is that Upland religion (Appalachia, the Piedmont, the Ozarks) is in truth a complex and seriously held system of beliefs that supplies as much meaning for Uplanders as Episcopalianism and Presbyterianism offer sophisticated urbanites. And maybe more.

Actually, this Upland religion is far from monolithic—Calvinists, for example, differ with their more optimistic brethren—but it is all marked by a clear distinction between the spiritual and the temporal realms and Satan tends to be a real presence. ("The greatest minds among us," says a North Georgia Baptist preacher, "have never found ... a way to distribute the bountiful food supply of our

world. Satan must derive some satisfaction from [that].")

The book takes up big questions—the nature of God, the purpose of life, the possibility of progress, the end of time—all in the words of preachers and other members of mountain churches. Universities and colleges would do well to pay more attention to such oral material, Jones says, and mainline churches could learn a great deal about faith from Uplanders. One thing about the latter: they don't condescend to those who are different from them. If you're going to work in Appalachia, Jones says in effect, leave loftiness at home.

Book Notes

You can obtain *Faith and Meaning in the Southern Uplands* from the Appalachian Center, College P.O. Box 2336, Berea, Ky. 40404-2336, at \$16.95 plus shipping (\$3.50 first book, .50 each additional book). Make checks payable to Berea College.

In the Spirit of Adventure: A 1914 Smoky Mountain Hiking Journal is an account taken from the diaries of D. R. Beeson, Sr., in the Archives of Appalachia at East Tennessee State. You can order it from the Center for Appalachian Studies and Services, P.O. Box 70556, ETSU, Johnson City, Tenn. 37614 (\$12.95 cloth; \$7.95 paper; make checks payable to ETSU/CASS).

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In Appalachian Heritage ...

Highlights of the Winter 1999 issue of *Appalachian Heritage* include a look back at World War I-era Berea and its attitudes toward the war, a varied group of short stories, and poems by new contributors.

You can obtain the magazine (\$6.00 a copy, \$18.00 for a year's subscription) from Appalachian Heritage, Appalachian Center, College P.O. Box 2336, Berea, Ky. 40404.

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